TELLS THE FACTS AND NAMES THE NAMES

CounterPunch

JUNE 1-15, 2010 ALEXANDER COCKBURN AND JEFFREY ST. CLAIR VOL. 17, NO. 11

Workers rise up after the Raspadskaya Mine Disaster

The Explosion

By Boris Kagarlitsky

Moscow

The Russian authorities are greatly afraid of any social explosion and take strenuous measures to head them off. They're particularly concerned about the situation in big cities with a high concentration of workers – as, for example, in the city of Togliatti, where the auto industry crisis has been threatening to erupt into mass protests.

Events were taking a predictable path. The government undertook measures to save the automotive industry. Opposition activists were hastily patching together regional coalitions, aiming to unite a variety of social movements and thus direct popular anger against the authorities. For their part, left ideologists staged lively discussions of the works of French philosophers and their mutual insults. In short: business as usual.

Then, from an entirely unexpected quarter, came trouble. On May 8, one day before the authorities in Moscow were to preside over an expensive and pompous celebration in honor of the defeat of Nazi Germany 65 years ago, a methane gas explosion rocked the Raspadskaya mine, located in Mezhdurechensk in West Siberia, 1,900 miles east of Moscow. When rescuers hastened to the aid of the miners, a second explosion thundered through the mine. Dozens of people found themselves in the underground trap. Five days later, 66 miners were officially declared dead, with a further 24 people listed as missing. Nevertheless, the following day it was decided to discontinue rescue operations and flood the damaged underground tunnels.

Only when the broadcasting frequencies ceased to be clogged with reports about the Victory parades, the official

KAGARLITSKY CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

Deadly Consequence of the 9/11 Attacks Is Only Now Beginning to Show Up

What the Asbestos Workers of Libby Montana Can Tell New Yorkers

By Andrea Peacock

Much has been made of the so-called Ground Zero Syndrome since the World Trade Center Towers collapsed, spewing pulverized construction material all over lower Manhattan. Lawsuits have been filed and settled, experts consulted, articles written, yet nearly nine years out we can only guess at the effects of asbestos on recovery workers and folks who lived in the vicinity. A recently released study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found an immediate decline in lung function for New York Fire Department and Emergency Medical personnel the first year after the Towers went down. While doctors continued to track those employees for another six years, they showed neither decline nor improvement.

As one industrial hygienist, who was on the scene, told me, "If you have too much of something, even water or good meal, it can affect you." There's no telling exactly what materials in that cloud of dust damaged those workers' lungs. But one thing is certain: the effects of asbestos have yet to be felt. With a latency period of 10 to 40 years or more, whatever asbestos-related diseases were unleashed that day are just gearing up.

Just as cleanup crews could have benefited enormously from the knowledge that the WTC's steel beams were insulated with asbestos-contaminated vermiculite from a W.R. Grace mine in Libby, Montana, so now might ailing New Yorkers learn from the experiences of this small town – experiences that I witnessed firsthand, for my book *Wasting Libby* which, culminates in the 2009 criminal trial of W.R. Grace & Co. executives.

It's September 26, 2001, a strikingly pretty day in northwestern Montana, and, for the first time in weeks, it seems fitting to celebrate. The rich, deep hues provoked by autumn's diffuse sunlight exorcize the pall cast by the month's events in New York City, at least in this corner of the world. It's Gayla Benefield's birthday next week, so her kids are throwing a surprise party just outside of town at the steakhouse, where her daughter Julie works. She had been on her way to an economic development meeting that night, but the ruse – that Julie had a migraine and wanted her mother to be with her – works. Everyone shouts "surprise" at the appropriate moment, and if Gayla isn't surprised, she's gracious enough not to show it.

The crowd is a mix of family, friends, and asbestos campaigners. The EPA guys were supposed to show up, too, but got distracted by a tire fire south of Polson on their way to the party. Attorney Roger Sullivan, ever neurotic, asks if the festivities are going to be on the record. We haggle a bit, and I offer to use my journalistic discretion. It really isn't needed – the toasts and roasts are all good-natured. Norita passes on the microphone, so Les gets up first to tell about the time he and Gayla traveled to Washington, D.C., to testify against a bill that would have effectively canceled most Libby claimants' rights to go to court. Wanting a beer one night, they walked endlessly looking for a bar; the one they found had never heard of go-cups (a Montana standard, for those who literally want one for the road).

PEACOCK CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PEACOCK CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Finally, an older woman stands to make a toast, "If it weren't for Gayla, nobody would care about those poor people breathing asbestos back in New York."

It's been only two weeks since the World Trade Center's collapse, and by September 26 we're just now starting to hear rumors of high asbestos readings in the massive dust cloud that blanketed lower Manhattan. EPA director, Christine Todd Whitman, has declared the area safe, but, in fact, both her agency and independent monitors have found the deadly fibers in the air, in the dust, in people's homes, and in their offices. According to the *New York Times*, approximately 20,000 people live within half a mile of the former World Trade Center. There is potentially a great tragedy in the making, the full scale of which perhaps can be understood only by the people gathered here tonight. There is silence, a collective shudder at the thought of it.

There are a lot of unanswered questions. But New York's EPA officials sure could have had a running start on the situation had they listened to their counterparts from Denver who, for two years, had been dealing with the Libby mess, ultimately stigmatized by the EPA as "the worst case of community-wide exposure to a toxic substance [asbestos] in U.S. history." If the New York EPA had paid attention, they would have known that the old method of counting fibers is dreadfully inadequate, that people can get sick 40 years after smaller, briefer exposures than were commonly accepted as safe, and that honesty and candor are the only way to earn the respect and cooperation of those you are trying to help.

Though none of us know it yet, the link from Libby to New York is closer than the commonality of death. According to the man who engineered the Trade Center Towers, it was W.R. Grace that supplied the fireproofing, which enveloped the steel beams holding the buildings up. And all the vermiculite in that material – thousands of tons worth – came from the mine on Vermiculite Mountain, near the town of Libby.

EPA director, Christine Todd Whitman, declared the area around Ground Zero safe, but, in fact, both her agency and independent monitors found the deadly fibers in the air, in the dust, in people's homes, and in their offices.

But in the days and weeks after the attack, the East Coast feds were more concerned with the panic that more bad news might bring, so, even as Gayla was blowing out the candles on her cake, rescue crews were working around the clock in the dust at Ground Zero without proper respirators. Within a few weeks, people would move back into their apartments. Those with the foresight and money could have their premises tested and cleaned. As for everyone else, they might as well be living in one of Libby's old houses, their apartments potentially just as full of invisible death as those Montana homes sifting Zonolite (a commercial name for vermiculite) dust from the attic that only the fanciest wet HEPA vacuum can clean up.

Someone should have known better. Libby's EPA guys offered their expertise, their microscopes, the benefit of their experience, and they were rebuffed. "We were not asked to participate in the response to the WTC disaster, and we feel it would be inappropriate for us to second guess actions taken there since we are not apprised of all the variables," toxicologist Chris Weis emailed me.

One New Yorker, a woman named Liz Berger, testified before a Senate subcommittee five months later on the difficulties and uncertainties facing the World Trade Center's former neighbors:

"It took eight guys in white suits and respirators five days to clean my apartment. But is it clean? No one tells you what to keep and what to toss… What's in the stuff? Every day the air smelled different, and the winds blew a different course.

"We reluctantly made our own rules, divined from press reports, high school science as we remembered it, and the advice of friends and neighbors. But even that was mixed. One scientist friend had his apartment tested and declared it safe for his family; the managing agent of his building, however, reported high levels of asbestos and lead. In the end, 248 stuffed animals, eight handmade baby quilts, five mattresses, a trousseau's worth of sheets and towels, a kitchen full of food and 13 leaf and lawn bags of toys went into our trash, but not our books, draperies and upholstered furniture, or our clothes, though the bill to dry clean them industrially was $16,500… Some people we know repainted but kept their mattresses. Some people kept their stuffed animals but threw away their furniture. Some people kept what they couldn't bear to lose and got rid of the rest. We have still not decided what to do about our floors: will stripping, sanding and resealing them contain the toxic mix of asbestos, fiberglass, concrete, human remains, heavy metals and the vague 'particulates,' or just release more of it into our indoor air?

"Indoor air quality is a touchy issue in our building. Converted in the late 1970s, we have a primitive air system that circulates air from apartment to apartment. Some people in our building hired professional cleaners. Others did it themselves, and a few locked the door and didn't come back for a while. After the guys in the suits left, we sealed our windows, filtered our vents, and bought six triple-HEPA-filtered air purifiers, which we run 24 hours a day. My clean air is making its way through the building, as is that of my less fastidious neighbors."

Liz Berger's current troubles are rooted in events that took place more than 20 years before Osama Bin Laden was born. By the early 1930s, the leaders of America's asbestos industry knew they

CounterPunch

EDITORS
Alexander Cockburn
Jeffrey St. Clair

ASSISTANT EDITOR
Alevtina Rea

BUSINESS
Becky Grant
Deva Wheeler

DESIGN
Tiffany Wardle

COUNSELOR
Ben Sonnenberg

CounterPunch
PO Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558
1-800-840-3683
counterpunch@counterpunch.org
www.counterpunch.org
All rights reserved.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were in trouble but, through a convoluted web of secret research, linguistic and legal maneuvers, managed to stay solvent for another 50 years – and keep their dirty secret quiet long enough to build the world's greatest skyscrapers, including the twin towers of New York.

More than two decades after the asbestos industry researchers made the cancer connection, an independent doctor working at the Mount Sinai Hospital in New York released the results of his research in a series of articles, which made the name Selikoff synonymous with asbestos. In 1964, Dr. Irving Selikoff laid to rest niggling doubts about the cancer link with a study finding elevated cancer deaths among asbestos insulation workers at more than seven times the normal rate. Even more shocking was his 1968 report, in which he described the synergistic effect between smoking and asbestos exposure, finding the risk level for cancer at 92 times the rate for the nonsmoking, non-asbestos-exposed population. He pushed these details at medical conferences and in the popular press, to the consternation of asbestos companies. "Dr. Selikoff started to speak out publicly to our knowledge in early 1969 around New York and, in fact, got the fireproofing subcontractors and sprayed fiber manufacturers association to form a committee to set standards to improve job conditions," Grace executive Thomas Egan writes in 1970. "The general feeling was that he would go away if he was treated gently. But this was not to be, as he stepped up his attack…" Testifying before a Congressional subcommittee in 1973, Selikoff predicted that if America didn't change its ways, one million workers would die of asbestos-related diseases by the turn of the century.

By the late 1960s, Selikoff's studies and the resulting publicity were having their intended effects. Cities and states began regulating asbestos use: New York, Chicago, Boston, California. Federal agencies followed suit. The Bureau of Mines, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, and Consumer Products Safety Council (CPSC) all regulated their corner of the asbestos market. Legal workplace exposure limits fell steadily, as a waterfall, through the 1970s: from 12 fibers per milliliter down to five, to two, and, finally, down to OSHA's current limit of .1 fibers/ml of air. The CPSC banned a few products in the late '70s – fake fireplace logs and asbestos hairdryers. Then, in the 1980s, the EPA waged a widely publicized campaign to remove asbestos from school buildings.

But it was one of the first asbestos rules that was the most far-reaching, and it gave the W.R. Grace Company fits over one of its most popular products, MonoKote. In 1973, the EPA won authority, under the federal National Emission Standard for Asbestos law, to ban friable (or easily crumbled) spray-on "asbestos-containing materials" with greater than one per cent asbestos content by dry weight – a category that included Grace's MonoKote-3. The recipe for MonoKote-3 called for about 12 per cent commercial chrysotile asbestos added to a blend of nearly 30 per cent of Libby's vermiculite grade three, and rounded out with 58 per cent gypsum.

Libby's EPA guys offered their expertise, their microscopes, the benefit of their experience of asbestos contamination, and they were rebuffed. "We were not asked to participate in the response to the WTC disaster."

Companies got around the requirement to some extent, because of the word "friable": theoretically, asbestos that was bound up in some way in a material that wouldn't crumble and disperse the fibers was safer. It became common for insulation and fireproofing manufacturers to "bind" their fibers with organic material like cellulose and rock wool. And there was good reason to do so. In the era of skyscrapers, spray-on insulation was in high demand. The construction industry used fireproofing that flowed easily through hoses and could be pumped to great heights. In the case of the World Trade Center, according to project engineer Hyman Brown, Grace's MonoKote was the fireproofing of choice, making it possible to use light-weight beams that otherwise might melt too quickly in case of fire. "Theoretically, you have fireproofing on a beam to retard the melting of the steel," he says, "and you put the fireproofing on the beam with the theory that the fire will only burn at about 1,200 degrees Fahrenheit, and, therefore, the fireproofing will do its job." The engineers did not anticipate a fire fed by jet fuel, which simply burned too hot for the fireproofing to handle, Brown says.

Grace president Bill Corcoran told reporters in the aftermath of the Towers' collapse that his company's products were not used in the World Trade Center's construction. But Allen Morrison, spokesperson for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (which owned the towers), contradicts Corcoran, saying that Grace's product was used to fireproof the buildings, though he could not give any details as to the quantity used.

By the time construction on the Trade Center's steel structures began in 1968, the buzz over asbestos disease began to crescendo. Grace won the contract to supply fireproofing for the project but was savvy enough to not refer to its product as MonoKote. "In an effort to provide the proper fire protection and provide heat flow into the column, it was felt that a dense vermiculite-gypsum plaster could best fulfill the needs," reads an April 1968 analysis prepared by Grace, titled, "Study of the Interior Fire Protection Requirements of the Exterior Columns for the World Trade Center Project." EPA toxicologist Chris Weis says this "dense vermiculite-gypsum plaster" was likely MonoKote-3. "They were calling it whatever they had to call it to market it," he says. "The vermiculite imparted the fireproofing. Unfortunately, it may have been, you know, five to 15 per cent tremolite asbestos."

In 1970, public outcry caught up with Grace. That April, the City of New York enacted a series of restrictions on sprayed asbestos-containing materials, which effectively prohibited the company's work at the World Trade Center. According to an article in the May 7 *Engineering News-Record*, "Sprayed-asbestos fireproofing operations on steel-framed buildings halted last week in New York City. The stoppage resulted from regulations written after medical research showed that asbestos fibers can cause cancer of the pulmonary and gastrointestinal tracts if ingested." The stoppage affected four

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

buildings in New York, according to the article. "Ironically, the World Trade Center project was the first and only building in the city where the spray contractor had taken precautions to prevent scattering of dried asbestos... The job, however, lacked the vacuum cleaning operation as required by the regulations." Workers had only insulated the first 70 floors of the North Tower at that point, according to a subsequent story in the *Newark Evening News*. But, as one internal corporate memo implies, Grace had anticipated such a move at least since 1969. "We should do everything we can to speed up our search for a substitute for the asbestos in our MonoKote," district

One news report at the time said the project called for an estimated 5,000 tons of sprayed fireproofing. Using Weis' calculations, that adds up to somewhere between 250 and 750 tons of tremolite asbestos.

manager Jim Cintani writes on October 3, 1969. "We would certainly be at a distinct advantage if we could say our product did not contain any asbestos."

By the time Grace was kicked off the job in 1970, it had a substitute product to offer. "We are currently working on modifying the MonoKote formula to replace the asbestos and have fire tests scheduled with the Underwriters' Laboratories in the next two months," Grace official Rod Vining writes on April 10, 1970, three days before New York City's new regulations took effect. "We are currently working on trying to get a switch made at the World Trade Center and other building projects."

Grace won approval from the City of New York in 1971 to use its new product, MonoKote-4, which the company marketed as being a "non-asbestos-fireproofing product." And, truly, the company figured out a way to substitute a cellulose-based fiber for the 12 per cent commercial chrysotile in MonoKote-3 but still used Libby vermiculite grade three. And that ore, Weis says, was the baddest

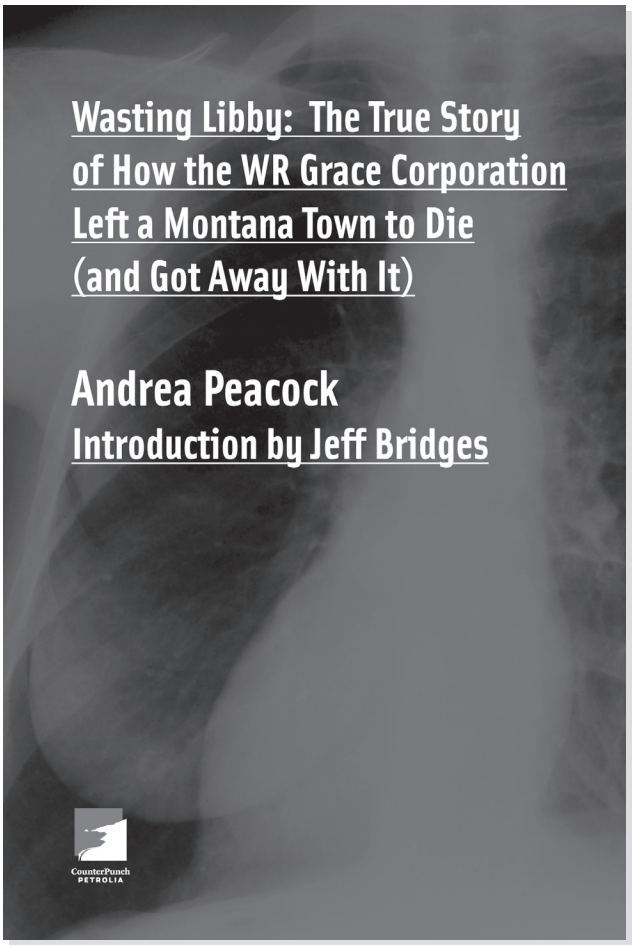
CounterPunch Books

"*Wasting Libby* is a smart, solid and resonant account of corporate wickedness and the small Montana company town betrayed unto the very death by its largest employer."

— Joy Williams, author of *Ill Nature* and *The Changeling*

"Andrea Peacock skillfully exposes a true axis of evil and its dire human effects. This is a 'must read' for people of conscience."

— Jim Harrison, author of *Dalva* and *The English Teacher*


Wasting Libby: The True Story of How the WR Grace Corporation Left a Montana Town to Die (and Got Away With It)
Andrea Peacock
Introduction by Jeff Bridges
CounterPunch
PETROLIA

Wasting Libby's story, which culminates in the 2009 criminal trial of WR Grace & Co. executives, is ultimately the tale of the families who fought the corporation for justice, who refused to sacrifice their dignity even as they lost their lives.

To order **CounterPunch** books and newsletter subscriptions call **1 (800) 840-3683** or visit our website **www.counterpunch.org**

The Most Widely Read Radical Website In The English Language

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the bad. "Size three probably had more tremolite asbestos than any of the Libby ore," he says.

According to engineer Brown, now a professor at the University of Colorado in Boulder, that switch was made at the World Trade Center. "So, I can tell you right now that [MonoKote-3] was used in the first building, most of the first building, and [MonoKote-4] was used for the rest of the first building and the second building because we were told that [MonoKote-4] did not have asbestos in it."

Two hundred and forty-four steel beams ringed each of the towers, with more beams around each elevator core, and steel trusses supporting every one of 110 floors in both buildings. Though Brown doesn't recall specifically how much MonoKote went into the towers, one news report at the time said the project called for an estimated 5,000 tons of sprayed fireproofing. Using Weis' calculations, that adds up to between 250 and 750 tons of tremolite asbestos.

If asbestos-related diseases begin showing up in rescue workers and others exposed at Ground Zero in the next few years, there's little doctors can do about it. There's medication to ease the symptoms of asbestosis – in which scar tissue caused by asbestos fibers gradually suffocates victims – but no cure. Those with lung disease can forestall the inevitable decline by taking care of themselves: quit smoking, get plenty of exercise to keep their lung capacity as high as possible. It could take another 30 years for mesothelioma cases to manifest – an asbestos-related lung cancer that kills fast once it hits. The full legacy of that day, for which W.R. Grace now bears some responsibility, will be unfolding for decades.

CP

Andrea Peacock has covered Montana politics and western environmental news for nearly two decades. A former editor of the *Missoula Independent*, Peacock is the co-author of *The Essential Grizzly: The Mingled Fates of Men and Bears* with her husband, Doug. She lives south of Livingston, Montana. This month, CounterPunch Books is releasing Peacock's *Wasting Libby: the True Story of How the WR Grace Corporation left a Montana town to die (and got away with it.)* She can be reached at apeacock@wispwest.net

Here's One "Quicksand" You Should Wade Into

By Jeffrey Blankfort

There is a book out there that the Israel lobby doesn't want Americans to read. It's *Quicksand: America's Pursuit of Power in the Middle East*, by professor Geoffrey Wawro, released by Penguin in April. Although Wawro, who teaches Military History at the University of North Texas, has a distinguished reputation in his field, his latest book has yet to receive a single review or even a mention in the mainstream press.

There is no way that Wawro can be portrayed as a wild-eyed radical, outside of the mainstream, and a "he's anti-Semitic" smear campaign on the Lobby's part would quite likely backfire.

Before writing *Quicksand*, Wawro had specialized in nineteenth-century European military history, a relatively tranquil field of study. Writing a history of U.S. involvement in the Middle East that paints a critical picture of Israel and its U.S. lobby is something else. That's what Wawro has discovered to his surprise. After producing such histories as *The Austro-Prussian War*, *The Franco-Prussian War*, and *Warfare and Society in Europe, 1792-1914* – the first two of which became History and Military Book Club selections, and the third a standard college text – Wawro ventured into dangerous territory, when he produced a comprehensive (702 pages) history of U.S. involvement in the Middle East.

Unlike his works on European history that were warmly welcomed by the media, *Quicksand* has been ignored. It is not hard to figure out why. Clearly, he is paying the price for his shredding of popular myths about the establishment of Israel, his clear sympathy for the Palestinians, and his exposure of the workings of the Zionist lobby going back to the administration of President Woodrow Wilson, all of which topics Wawro covers straightforwardly, pulling no punches.

There is no way that Wawro can be portrayed as a wild-eyed radical, outside of the mainstream, and a "he's anti-Semitic" smear campaign on the Lobby's part would quite likely backfire, although it is not out of the question. Before taking his current post, the telegenic Wawro was professor of Strategic Studies at the Naval War College and became visible to a sizeable segment of the reading public when he hosted History Channel's book show, *Hardcover History*, and was the host and anchor of the History Channel programs, *History's Business* and *History vs. Hollywood*, as well as *Hard Target*, *Global View*, and *History in Focus*.

It was, in fact, the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon which turned his attention from 19th century Europe to the Middle East and sent him on a quest to find out why people of that region bear such a degree of ill will toward the United States and the West.

This is not a polemic. *Quicksand* contains 60 pages of tiny footnotes, nine pages of bibliography, and a superb index, many of the former originating from documents in British and U.S. National Archives that had either been ignored or recently declassified. Taken together, they convinced Wawro that the main reason for anti-U.S. sentiments has been U.S. support for Israel and that this support has been engendered to a large extent by "the bluster" of the Israel [and pre-Israel] lobby, "to which every president since Wilson has succumbed."

"The Truman instinct on Israel," writes Wawro, "became the abiding American instinct. Every U.S. president after Truman tailored his electoral campaigns – as well as midterm congressional ones – to the exigencies of what gradually came to be known as the 'Israel Lobby'... The Israel Lobby developed a bullying reputation – pointing out that American Jews were concentrated in critical states with vital blocs of electoral votes and that they gave generously to friendly campaigns and not at all to unfriendly ones. It became difficult for American presidents

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to 'reassess' Middle Eastern policy or to 'downgrade' Israel U.S. assessments for the simple reason that there was a potentially lethal political price to pay."

"During the Cold War," Wawro points out, "Israel policy and lobbying involved driving a wedge between Washington and the Arabs," a salient fact that has largely been ignored in the debate over the lobby's power, but of which Washington was well aware. "Domestically produced U.S. support for Israel created a strategic problem," writes Wawro, "in which Israel was portrayed by Arab governments as an 'American pawn,' a conspiracy 'minted' on Wall Street, and so on. The fact that none of this was true – *America seemed as much a pawn to Israeli intrigues as the other way around* – did not diminish the canard's effectiveness in pulling important countries like Iraq, Syria and Egypt into opposition to the West" which, given its proximity to the region's oil fields, "empowered Tel Aviv" because "Israel could now pose as the indispensable ally, committed to uphold not only the West's influence, but its energy security as well." (Emphasis added.)

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Israel and its domestic lobby kept to the same game plan, only now, Wawro writes, "the threat is Arabs/al-Qaeda or Arabs/Hezbollah and the Israelis labor to create the same polarization that worked until the fall of the Soviets, this time pitting Washington and Tel Aviv against transnational terrorism and its state sponsors. Israeli and neocon connivance in Operation Iraqi Freedom has opened eyes in Washington to the perils of this isolating dynamic, but the 'interdependence' of Israel and America, forged in Congress and on the campaign trail, remains."

Wawro is not sparing in his description of the manner in which five pro-Likud Jewish neocons Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, David Wurmser, and Scooter Libby, all serving in critical positions in the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld-Rice power structure, transferred the Clean Break doctrine that Perle, Wurmser, and Feith had earlier helped to prepare for Benjamin Netanyahu in 1996, calling for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, into a collection of falsified facts that were used to justify the United States doing just that in 2003, with its all too visible attendant costs. Although Wawro devotes considerable space to both U.S. wars in the Gulf, the reader doesn't even get into them until the latter portion of *Quicksand*.

After sketching America's earliest interest in the Middle East in the middle of the 19th century in his introduction, Wawro takes us from World War One and the Balfour Declaration and the discovery of oil under the sands of the Arabian desert to last year's clash, between President Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. This is the only way, Wawro believes, "to convey the accumulating pressures that have lodged America in the Middle East."

His first two chapters, "Zion" and "Oil", express what he sees as the two great competing drivers, or poles, of U.S. activity in the region: the first being the domestic pressure to support the establishment and subsequent protection of a Jewish state in historic Palestine and the other, the strategic "need for Persian Gulf oil and gas after World War II, when U.S. supplies peaked and began to decline and the need to *control* that oil" in the face of perceived threats from the Soviet Union. (Emphasis in original.)

"Already in 1948, the Truman administration regretted the arrogance and brutality of Jewish ethnic cleansing in the Arab parts of Palestine but did nothing about it."

"Some readers," he warns, may be perturbed or merely surprised by the portrait of Israel and Israel-U.S. relations … but the facts lead there; indeed, my approach to Israel is no different from my approach to every other country in this book. It is solidly rooted in American and British archives, journalism – 'the first draft of history' – and scholarly literature." That the Saudis and other countries in or involved in the region's history of the past century fare no better at Wawro's hands will certainly not placate those for whom Israeli exceptionalism or, to coin a word, exemptionalism, is sacrosanct.

Israel's domestic supporters will no doubt be further enraged to learn that Wawro, borrowing from research compiled by some of Israel's "new historians," as well as from British archives, sees Israel's "war for independence" in 1948 in far different terms than what Americans, both Jews and non-Jews, have been taught to believe. Rather than it being "plucky little Israel fighting off an Arab giant," he writes, "Israel was the Goliath and the Arab coalition – with its small brigade strength Egyptian, Jordanian, Syrian and Iraqi contingents – was David."

What emerges from *Quicksand*, Wawro concludes, "is the craven neglect of our policy [not Israel's] on Israel and Palestine. Already in 1948, the Truman administration regretted the arrogance and brutality of Jewish ethnic cleansing in the Arab parts of Palestine but did nothing about it because of Cold War rivalry and what Truman called the 'pressure boys' of the Israel lobby. Each subsequent administration cried foul – 'Henry, they can't do this to us *again*,' Nixon wailed to Kissinger in 1973 – but failed to crack down on Israeli foul play because of the same worries that creased Truman's brow. (Emphasis in original.)

"Today," he writes, when "the Cold War threat has been replaced by the terrorism threat, all the more reason to exert massive pressure on the Israelis to concede a real Palestinian state that will gather in lots of foreign aid and interest, and either sink or swim by their own effort… The Israelis had decades to compensate the refugees and restore the occupied territories; they never did. They have always harped upon the dangers of the Palestinians and presumably always will, and have counted on Washington, as Gold Meir put it, 'because of the Jewish vote.' As is the case with Saudi Arabia, the United States cannot exert real influence for positive change in the Middle East until it first breaks a lance for the people who were run out of their homes in 1948."

In a blurb on the book's jacket, professor John Mearsheimer writes, "*Quicksand* should be required reading for everyone in Washington who has a hand in formulating policy toward the Arab and Islamic world." I would add that in the hands of those seriously engaged in pro-Palestinian advocacy, it can become a powerful tool.

CP

Jeffrey Blankfort can be contacted at jblankfort@earthlink.net

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

KAGARLITSKY CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

speeches and the festivities, did the country fully realize the scale of the Raspadskaya mine catastrophe. Not surprisingly, the explosion of methane in the Kuzbas [the Kusnetsk Basin] became the signal for an ensuing explosion of mass anger. When it became known that rescue operations had been halted, spontaneous meetings gathered in Mezhdurechensk. Failing to get answers from local authorities, miners blocked the tracks of the Trans-Siberian Railway. Against the demonstrators was thrown OMON – "Special Purpose Police Unit," riot police. Shields and batons were used to quell the protests.

The angry crowd threw stones at the riot police. Both sides had their wounded. The fact that the outbreak of social protest erupted in the mining region could have been predicted beforehand, based on the experience of 1989. Back then, the miners' strike paralyzed the coal industry in the Soviet Union, thus precipitating the crisis of the Soviet system. Since then the miners movement had been severely weakened. The Independent Trade Union of Miners lost a significant portion of its members and organizations. Closure of mines and losing labor disputes demoralized workers. The miners' leaders have made one blunder after another, first supporting Yeltsin and his reforms, later – setting their hopes on the so-called red governor, Aman Tuleyev. Soon after, a harsh police regime – established by former oppositionist Tuleyev in Kemerovskaya province – choked all sprouts of civil activity.

Against this background, It is understandable that neither the government nor employers, nor local authorities nor, possibly, the miners themselves did not anticipate the popular upsurge in Mezhdurechensk on May 14-15. The accident at the mine Raspadskaya suddenly demonstrated that people's patience is not unlimited. In the mines in Russia and Ukraine, deadly accidents occur constantly, thus demonstrating the obvious consequences of privatization policies and restructuring of the mine industry, carried out by authorities of both countries.

Of course, it would be wrong to assert that everything was good in the Soviet coal industry. If such had been the case, the famous strike of 1989 would not have never happened. But back then, when the mines were state-owned, major accidents with fatalities and gross violations of safety rules were still the exception. Once the industry was privatized, the value of human life has plummeted. And not only in the eyes of the owners, who save on security measures in the name of profit, but in the eyes of the miners themselves, who, by their own admission, often take risks for the sake of increasing production. It is precisely the low wages and the desire of management to get the most out of tired people and worn-out equipment that have created the current disastrous situation.

With the onset of Russia's most recent economic crisis, the situation has deteriorated even further. Alternative employment opportunities for the inhabitants of mining regions are extremely limited. Only liberal economists could come up with the idea that the miners, dissatisfied with their earnings, should go to small business. In the existing economic structure, there are simply not enough funds or even space for so many "small businessmen." Where will they get the initial capital? What will they sell? And to whom?

When it became known that the rescue operations had been halted, spontaneous meetings gathered in Mezhdurechensk. Miners blocked the tracks of the Trans-Siberian Railway.

When the riots started, Governor Tuleyev blamed them on the local unemployed population. However, it is sensible to ask more probing questions about the large numbers of unemployed youth in Mezhdurechensk. Why is this youth so aggressive? Is not that in itself the result of economic and social policy of the authorities and, primarily, of this same Tuleyev?

The workers who came to the demonstration after the accident at Raspadskaya demanded higher wages and better working conditions. The authorities stubbornly repeated that all claims should be addressed not to them but to the owners of the mine, thus fulfilling the requirements of neoliberal idelogy, which stipulates the government's total noninterference in labor relations.

But, in fact, regulation of wages may well be a matter for the state, even if it has tried to make a point of deliberately abdicating this responsibility, thus handing over its functions to the private owners. Furthermore, because officials are quick to take credit for any positive processes happening within their jurisdiction, it is not surprising that the citizens will hold them responsible for any troubles transpiring in the same territory.

At the same time, experience gained over the years allows the workers to understand that the authorities and entrepreneurs constantly act together, and, therefore, claims to the latter suggest equal claims to the former. If someone didn't understand this before, the crisis finally clarified the matter.

In the end, even Governor Tuleyev had to agree that the miners' demands were justified. However, this happened only after the confrontation moved into the explosive phase, when clashes broke out between workers and OMON. The conflict in Mezhdurechensk can be

Subscription Information

Subscription information can be found at www.counterpunch.org or call toll-free inside the U.S. 1-800-840-3683

Published twice monthly except July and August, 22 issues a year.

1 - year hardcopy edition $45
2 - year hardcopy edition $80
1 - year email edition $35
2 - year email edition $65
1 - year email & hardcopy edition $50
1 - year institutions/supporters $100
1 - year student/low income $35

Renew by telephone, mail or on our website. For mailed orders please include name, address and email address with payment, or call 1-800-840-3683 or 1-707-629 3683. Add $17.50 per year for subscriptions mailed outside the U.S.A.

Make checks or money orders payable to:
CounterPunch
Business Office
PO Box 228, Petrolia, CA 95558

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CounterPunch
PO Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558

**Phone 1-800-840-3683
or visit our website to find
out about CounterPunch's
latest books!**

1st Class
Presort
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 269
Skokie, IL

First Class

return service requested

resolved by the traditional combination of repressions and concessions. But events suggest that, despite the best efforts of the government, despite voices loudly proclaiming victory over the economic recession, the social crisis in the country is growing. You can keep a team of analysts predicting the emergence of "hot spots" on the map of Russia, thus making it possible to develop countermeasures to fight against mass unrest. But in circumstances when the social crisis is increasingly affecting the entire society, nobody can predict where exactly and why the next surge of discontent will crest. So long as social issues are not being resolved and until there are shifts in social and economic priorities, the crisis will deepen.

As for the leftists, the oppositionists and even the trade unionists, all too often find themselves in the role of dumbfounded onlookers. Over the past months, the leaders of the Independent Trade Union of Miners – once the most important public force in Kuzbass – were occupied not with drafting miners' demands but with disputes with the management of the All-Russian Confederation of Labor apropos issues of membership and organization in the shaping of free trade unions. Meanwhile, the workers' protests are developing.

The decline of trade unionism in the coal industry, apparent over the past decade and a half, is closely linked with the triumph of neoliberalism. Free trade unions were unable to spot the danger and to rise to combat it on a timely basis. When it became clear that the new private owners weren't much concerned with trade unions, especially the free ones, it was too late.

So long as social issues are not being resolved and until there are decisive shifts in social and economic priorities, the crisis will deepen.

However, the defeat of the workers' organizations does not mean the end of the labor movement. What happens is that the protest takes some other forms. Instead of organized resistance, we see a spontaneous rebellion. The labor movement is set back in the historical sense but is not destroyed, is not dead. It is not possible to extinguish workers' protests, as long as there is wage labor and its exploitation by capital.

Spontaneous discontent among the masses will determine changes in the social life of the country in the near future. Spontaneous protests by themselves will not transform society. But they will give impetus to the changes that are unfolding on different levels. The authorities have to do something in order to calm the public and gain control. Alas, the left organizations and trade unions so far remain as mainly observers and commentators. If they want to influence the situation in Russia, they will have to undergo many changes within themselves. **CP**

Translated by Alevtina Rea.

Boris Kagarlitsky is Director of the Institute of Globalization and Social Movements in Moscow and editor-in-chief of the *Levaya Politika* (Left Politics) quarterly. His most recent book is *Empire of the Periphery: Russia and the World System* (2008).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED